

Central Chilterns

ANCIENT CHILTERN WOODLANDS

HS2 references: Area CFA9 - Unique IDs CC019, CC030, CC050, CC109

Summary:

With few exceptions, Chiltern woodlands contain archaeological remains that are key evidence for human settlement over a long period from prehistory to medieval times. For this reason the 8.8 hectares of Sibley's Coppice, Mantle's Wood and Farthing's Wood that are to be destroyed by HS2, as well as the identifiable earthworks in Mantle's Wood, must be given the highest level of professional archaeological investigation and excavation before HS2 construction begins.

Assessment:

The construction of HS2 across the central Chilterns requires the removal of sections of three 'ancient woodlands'. These are listed in the ES Gazetteer as:

Woodland	ES Unique ID	Area to be taken
Sibley's Coppice	CC050	2.1 hectares plus road widening
Mantle's Wood	CC019	6.2 hectares
Farthing's Wood	CC030	0.5 hectare

The work will also affect Mantle's Wood Earthworks (CC109).

All three areas are described in the ES Gazetteer as 'Ancient and semi-natural [or 'replanted'] woodland'. They are 'a surviving remnant of more extensive forest as part of the mosaic of other stands of surviving ancient woodland in the surrounding landscape', whose 'value lies in its potential for well preserved archaeological remains of woodland management and industries typical of woodland such as wood banks, saw pits, quarries and small settlements. They can also preserve features of earlier periods.' (Appendix CH-002-009 page 18 item CC050)

Within Mantle's Wood are earthworks indicating possible below-ground archaeological remains connected with the medieval Mantell's manor, held at the time of Domesday Book (1086) by Turstin Mantel. (Appendix CH-002-009 page 8 items CC018 and CC019)

The Environmental Statement concludes that Mantle's Wood is one of three areas with 'the highest potential for surviving buried archaeological remains', while noting that 'There is a similar potential at Sibley's Coppice and Farthing's Wood...' (Appendix CH-001-009 page 62 paragraphs 8.1.15 and 8.1.13)

Recent research* has shown that Chiltern woodlands contain rich but often unrecognised archaeological evidence of human settlement over a very long period, from prehistory right up to the early 20th century. There are two reasons for this.

First, parts of the Chilterns cleared by the Iron Age reverted to woodland after the Roman period. And it is in these remaining areas of 'ancient woodland', uncleared and uncultivated since, that the

archaeology of these earliest settlements remains longest undisturbed. In places they preserve prehistoric field systems that have been destroyed elsewhere by later cultivation.

Second, in the later medieval period the conjunction of plentiful wood and timber with the natural resources of clay and chalk led to a woodland economy that lasted in some places into the early 20th century. Chiltern woodlands therefore also preserve a second archaeology of woodland management and woodland industries.

Recent surveys have shown** that just about all Chiltern woodlands contain archaeology. Sibley's Coppice, Mantle's Wood and Farthing's Wood will be no exceptions.

The ES Impact Assessment for all four of these sites – three woodlands and one earthworks – gives them a high value, but records the impact of HS2 construction as 'Medium adverse' and its effect as 'Major adverse'. All four sites will be destroyed. (Appendix CH-003-009 pages 4, 6, 10 and 18)

In our view

The 8.8 hectares of Sibley's Coppice, Mantle's Wood and Farthing's Wood that are to be destroyed, as well as the identifiable earthworks in Mantle's Wood, must be given the highest level of professional archaeological investigation and excavation before HS2 construction begins.

As we have not had time to study the Ecology topic in the Environmental Statement, we have to assume that an adequate record of woodland flora and fauna will be made. Early map evidence should be used to trace historic hedgerows and enable them to be recorded.

NOTES

* See for example John Morris, *The Cultural Heritage of Chiltern Woods* (Chiltern Landscape Project, Chinnor 2009) and David Green and Sandy Kidd, *The Making of the Chiltern Landscape: the Chilterns Historic Landscape Characterisation Project* (Chiltern Conservation Board, Buckinghamshire County Council and the National Trust, 2010).

** See Wainwright, Marshall and Salkeld, *An Archaeological Survey of the Ashridge Estate* (National Trust 2010) and Gary Marshall, *Survey report on Park Wood, Bradenham* (forthcoming).